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Confronting the Superstitious Church of the 21st Century

by G. Richard Fisher

“Thus says the Lord of hosts: Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord” (Jeremiah 23:16).

As we move into the twenty-first century, even the comments of comedian and award-winning filmmaker Woody Allen seem to make sense. Allen remarked: “History repeats itself. It has to — nobody listens the first time around.”

We have been fighting and will continue to fight battles which we thought were won or put to rest in the first three centuries of the Church’s history. What used to be commonplace in the world of the occult and in the world of hyper-liberalism is now common in the world of both Charismatic and Evangelical Christianity.

There has been an incredible paradigm shift in the world of Christianity. This shift has been so radical that the Church of Jesus Christ is beginning to resemble the culture of Athens found in Acts 17. Luke speaks out in verse 21 and describes the confusion in this way: “For all the Athenians



and foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or hear some new thing.” Luke then concludes in verse 22 by quoting the Apostle Paul as saying, “in all things you are very religious.” Indeed, the god of novelty was

reigning in Athens.

The word “religious” in Acts 17:22 (translated in some versions as superstitious) is the Greek word *deisidaimon*.¹ It has to do with fear of the supernatural. It was a practice that was all-embracing and non-discerning with a reverence for all kinds of deities, religious notions, religious fads and religious claims. It lacked discretionary thought and would try anything with the word “religion” tacked to it. It was mindless reverence and mindless religion with a love for newness and novelty.

The parallels to our own age are stark and frightening. Just pick up a copy of *Charisma* magazine and glance at its advertisements and its promotional items. It is Athens all over again — with a vengeance. How can the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth be leading in so many contradictory paths? The confusion (and the non-biblical mysticism) is palpable. Many

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you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:19-21).

Endnotes:

1. *The Man Who Saw Tomorrow* with Orson Welles, Warner Bros., Inc., 1981. The video version of this motion is available by Warner Home Video, 1986.
2. NBC Special, *The Man Who Saw Tomorrow* hosted by Charlton Heston. This program aired Wednesday, Feb. 20, 1991, tape on file.
3. While several web sites offer research and reference material on Nostradamus, the most thorough is "The Prophecies of Michel Nostradamus" web site located at: www.telebyte.nl/~zaphod/nostra.html
4. Robert A. Morey, *Horoscopes and the Christian*. Minneapolis: Bethany House

- Publishers, 1981, pp. 20-21.
5. "A 20th Century Look at Nostradamus - Was He God's Prophet During the 16th Century?", *PFO Newsletter*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 5, 7.
6. Erika Cheetham, *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*. New York: Perigee Books, 1973, pg. 5.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Charles A. Ward, *Oracles of Nostradamus*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940, pg. 10.
9. *Ibid.*, pg. 26.
10. *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 13.
11. *Oracles of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 58, brackets in original, emphasis added. This "prophecy" is highlighted by Gus Vandermeer in *Nostradamus and Other Amazing Experts' Amazing Predictions For The Year 2000 and Beyond*. Lantana, Fla.: Micro-Mags, 1998, pg. 11.
12. John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1894, Vol. VII, pg. 197.
13. *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 33.
14. Henry C. Roberts, *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus*. New York: Nostradamus, Inc., 1949, (Twelfth printing, 1962),

- pg. 17, emphasis added.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 191.
16. *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 262.
17. Erika Cheetham, *The Further Prophecies of Nostradamus - 1985 and Beyond*. New York: Perigee Books, 1985, pg. 76.
18. *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 124.
19. Century I, Quatrain 81.
20. *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 36.
21. *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 60.
22. "Century 1, 81 — Space Shuttle Disaster," from www.alumni.caltech.edu/~jamcsf/spacesh.html. (Italic added to separate quatrain quotes from commentary.)
23. *Horoscopes and the Christian*, op. cit., pg. 20.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
25. *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pp. 88-89.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.
27. *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 336.
28. "Nostradamus Past, Present & Future," *Sun* magazine, Dec. 19, 1995, pg. 20.
29. *Oracles of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 41.
30. *Ibid.*, pg. 39.



SUPERSTITIOUS CHURCH

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of these new quirks are touted as the end time revival and people jump on the new bandwagon until they tire of it or a more exciting wagon rolls in.

We must come to grips not only with the reality of superstition in the Church but have a plan to resist that superstition. Let's look first at:

THE REALITY OF SUPERSTITION IN THE CHURCH

Dr. Peter Jones, professor of New Testament at Westminster Seminary in Southern California, captures the large view as he surveys how our churches have moved toward experience-driven religion and eastern mysticism:

"Belief that the human is divine, and thus essentially good, helps explain the burgeoning quest for personal spiritual discovery, to

the detriment of doctrine and truth. Mysticism has replaced true spirituality. Companies in the West, seeing commercial value in such optimism, are using these ideas to produce better sales personnel. Madison Avenue and the gurus could be an unstoppable, unholy alliance feeding the machine of political correctness. As an expression of divinity, each self is a source of truth."²

If anyone doubts that this is an age of religious fadism, confusion and superstition, just visit a Christian bookstore. There you will find:

- Hannah Hurnard — New Age occultist and aura reader.
- Madame Guyon — a mystic heretic.
- Madeleine L'Engle — who says the God of the Old Testament is "a male chauvinistic pig."
- Many of the latest psycho-babble theories.

- Dream interpretation and prophetic words for the 1990s by Vineyard prophets.
- Alternative medicine and Bible Codes.
- So-called revival stories with people acting like crass fools or animals.
- Instructions on how to get rid of ancestral demons and curses and do spiritual mapping.
- And on and on, *ad nauseam, ad infinitum*.

Truly it is like Athens and like the second-century age of heresy described by Philip Schaff when he said of that era, "strange medleys of Christian and unchristian elements in chaotic ferment."³

Modern reformer Michael Horton has written to show that there are many religious trends in the world today alerting us to the reemerging heresy of Gnosticism. He lays it out clearly:

"So far, we have seen an emerging shape to this elusive heresy

of the ancient church, distinct from orthodoxy in the following preferences:

- ♦ the subjective over the objective
- ♦ the secret and private over the public
- ♦ mystical experience over critical understanding
- ♦ the feminine over the masculine
- ♦ spirit over matter
- ♦ eternity over time
- ♦ direct encounters with God over events mediated by matter and history
- ♦ spiritual techniques for gaining access to and control over the secrets of the universe
- ♦ salvation from the body, time, institutions, and escape into a realm of pure spirit.”⁴

Faith-healer Benny Hinn can boast to his Hawaiian audience that he has received visions of the dead Kathryn Kuhlman and from these revelations has received direction for his ministry from her.⁵ Sadly, his admission of necromancy and spiritism does not raise even a whimper or cry of shock and outrage anywhere from inside his camp. Necromancy is now being advocated in the Church of Jesus Christ and it was the very thing that brought the demise of King Saul (1 Chronicles 10:13).

In a recent *Christianity Today* article, “The Future of Evangelical Theology,” Thomas Oden laments:

“The Babylonian captivity to novelty is the temptation of all modern reflection. It is invading evangelical leadership at an alarming rate in ways disturbing to evangelicals in the mainline who have suffered from its bewitchments for two centuries.”⁶

Dr. Virginia Mollenkott, professor of English at New Jersey’s William Patterson College and who is promoted in some evangelical churches, though an admitted lesbian, is now proposing the shocking and bewildering claim that *Jesus Christ was really a woman*. At a news conference for the National Council of Churches she

cited a *Journal of American Scientific Affiliation* article which argued:

“Jesus was born in parthenogenesis; that parthenogenetic births are always female; that in some cases, therefore, he would be willing to refer to Jesus as ‘she’ — up until the last minute of sex reversal, in which case Jesus remains chromosomally female throughout life, but functions as a normal male and looks like a normal male.”⁷

Kathryn Riss, the wife of twentieth-century revival historian Richard M. Riss, claims to have gotten the following song directly from the Lord. In part its lyrics are:

“I just laugh like an idiot and bark like a dog,
If I don’t sober up, I’ll likely hop like a frog!
I’ll crow like a rooster at the break of day,
‘Cause the Holy Ghost is moving, and I can’t stay away!
I’ll roar like a lioness who’s on the prowl,
I’ll laugh and shake, maybe hoot like an owl!
Since God’s holy river started bubbling in me,
It spills outside, and now it’s setting me free!
So, I’ll crunch and I’ll dip and I’ll dance round and round,
The pew was fine, but it’s more fun on the ground!
So I’ll jump like a pogo stick, then fall to the floor,
‘Cause the Holy Ghost is moving, and I just want MORE!”⁸

Authors James R. Coggins and Paul G. Hiebert express their view as to why there is such a low level of discernment and doctrinal understanding in today’s Church:

“There is a dangerous tendency in our age to seek infallible gurus, faultless leaders, and follow them blindly. Professional athletes who have been Christians for two years become our role models. Evangelists are asked to advise us on theology. Professional Christian singers be-

come our Bible teachers.”⁹

The Church at large is in deep trouble because its leaders and people no longer believe in the absolute *sufficiency* of the Scriptures for life and godliness, as both Peter and Paul proposed (2 Timothy 3:14-17, 2 Peter 1:2-4). And doubly sad is the fact that if these things are pointed out, the one crying out for discernment and reformation is bashed as a Pharisee and heretic hunter.

People are running everywhere looking for esoteric solutions to conditions caused by lack of attention to God’s Word. People like Mark Bubeck are combining smatterings of clinical psychology with bizarre and subjective practices and advising people to pray that God would search their sexual organ, blood, bones, muscles, glands, hair, skin and cells for demon activity.¹⁰

These are repulsive things to have to write about but such activities are being promoted by so-called bondage breakers and demon busters. Such things cannot be even remotely found anywhere in the Bible. They are figments of wild and convoluted imaginations. It is Athens all over again. Bubeck continues to be a lucrative and brisk seller for Moody Press and it offers no apologies. It is difficult to question a best-selling author.

The Church today is adrift on a sea of neo-gnosticism and subjectivism. It is spending its time in just hearing and telling new things. Sadly, the smorgasbord for Athens is many of the Christian magazines because of the large amounts of income generated through advertising and sales. Truth has been sacrificed for Athens. Hocus-pocus is now groovy and the Bible is a drag. “Does it feel good?” and “Will it sell?” is all that is being asked. Again we would state that the massive move away from the sufficiency of Scripture is creating incredible problems that all the false solutions and fad panaceas will never repair or heal.

Added to this deplorable state will be the Millennial madness centered around our move into the year 2000. The best kept secret is that, because of a calendar discrepancy, we had actu-

ally crossed into the year 2000 a few years ago. Remember King Herod, by all the historical accounts, died between 4 and 6 B.C. We have been through the year 2000 without a whimper and no one even noticed. What does that do to all the prophetic scenarios? In Athens no one really cares. It is the thought and the novelty that count.

Radio talk show host and author Bob Larson offers "A Live Exorcism Captured on Video!" featuring "A 20-hour exorcism condensed into two incredible hours. Scenes of the supernatural in action!" And all this for only \$100.¹¹ This is the same Bob Larson who claimed on the Trinity Broadcasting Network to have raised a comatose body by simply waving a Bible over it. The devil "told" Larson he was going to "kill" the person and caused his body temperature to plummet. Larson asserted that the Word is a lamp and God showed him it was a "heat lamp."¹² And the people who flock to Athens instead of being outraged, send their money and beg for more.

Then there is the angel craze and angel stories.¹³ They are almost mandatory in the writing of any book in recent years. Even Joni Eareckson Tada has an angel story and says she saw one as "a brilliant golden shape that glowed whisked by the large bay window I was facing — it didn't move from left to right, but from bottom to top."¹⁴ Three-time heavy-weight boxing champion Evander Holyfield writes about the angel who used to appear in his kitchen when he was a child. He would actually have us believe it was a black, bald headed angel!¹⁵ Benny Hinn has been spinning angel stories for years but like most of Hinn's material, no one else ever sees these things and they are unverifiable.¹⁶ They also go a long way in boosting one's superstar status.

The pursuit of angels should be off-limits for a Bible-believing Christian for a number of reasons. Paramount is a warning in Colossians 2:18 regarding intruding into the unseen realm of angels. The pursuit of angelic beings is a subtle diversion from the

only Mediator who is superior by comparison and from the study of Scripture.

The historic creeds from the fourth century forbid even the naming of angels.¹⁷ Satan can pose as an angel of light we are told in 2 Corinthians 11:14 and that should make any Christian extremely cautious. The Scriptures are clear that all of our guidance is to be sought in the Word through the Spirit.

So the reality of Athens and superstition is in our face. How do we go about resisting the superstition, the fads, the nonsense and mysticism that has overtaken the Church at large?

Let's move on to our second point:

RESISTING THE SUPERSTITION IN THE CHURCH

If we are going to successfully keep our balance and confront Athens, there must be the following posture:

1) A Total Commitment To The Doctrines Of Scripture.

The early Church is shown to have been committed to doctrine. In Acts 2:42 Luke reports that "they continued in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in the breaking of bread and prayers."

William Evans saw the need to know doctrine as one of the greatest needs of the Church, writing that, "There is probably no greater need in the Christian Church today than that its membership should be made acquainted with the fundamental facts and doctrines of the Christian faith."¹⁸

John Calvin, long ago, addressed the dangers of denigrating doctrine:

"It is an illusory belief of the enthusiasts that those who keep reading Scripture or hearing the Word are children, as if no one were spiritual unless he scorned doctrine. In their pride, therefore, they despise the ministry of men and even Scripture itself, in order to attain the Spirit. They then proudly try to peddle all the delusions that Satan suggests to

them as secret revelations of the Spirit."¹⁹

What we need is a revival of study and memorization of Scripture. That, followed by practical obedience to its commands, would eliminate the need to fabricate revival with ear-splitting music, bizarre manifestations, altered states of consciousness, and emotional frenzies. Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola is now issuing revival reports which include the practice of "sweeping." People run around frantically "sweeping" the demons out of the building and off the property.²⁰

Consider the commitment of the Apostle Paul to the importance of sound doctrine and hear him command our allegiance:

"That you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:3).

"Knowing that the law is not made for a righteous person but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners. ... and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:9-10).

"Now the Spirit speaks expressly that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1).

"If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of good doctrine which you have carefully followed" (1 Timothy 4:6).

"Till I come give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Timothy 4:13).

"Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Timothy 4:16).

"Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their

own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His *doctrine* may not be blasphemed" (1 Timothy 6:1).

"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the *doctrine* which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions" (1 Timothy 6:3-4).

"You have carefully followed my *doctrine*, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance" (2 Timothy 3:10).

In 2 Timothy we are told to:

Hold to sound doctrine (1:13).

Teach sound doctrine (2:2).

Abide in sound doctrine (3:14).

Preach sound doctrine (4:1-2).

From these verses we see that doctrine is not only vital but crucial and indispensable.

Doctrine denotes teaching and what is taught. The clear message of the Bible is that we are to give urgent and undivided attention to the Apostles' teachings now made permanent because they are inscripturated within the pages of the Bible. The Greek words for doctrine, *didache* and *didaskalia*, as used by Paul, stress not only the act of his delivering God's message to them but also the absolute authority of that teaching.²¹ Paul forcefully reminds the Corinthians: "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you *are the commandments of the Lord*" (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Peter says of the Apostles' doctrine:

"That you be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the *commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior*" (2 Peter 3:2).

Baker's Dictionary of Theology tells us on page 171 that, "Doctrine is the teaching of Scripture on theological

themes."

Abraham Friesen, professor of history at the University of California in Santa Barbara, gets to the heart of the problem of people trying to live by phenomenon rather than solid doctrine. He says the issue is:

"... the problem of the relationship of the written Word to the Holy Spirit. This is not a new problem. In the sixteenth century Martin Luther struggled against Thomas Muentzer, who sought to subordinate the Word to his mystical experience of the Spirit. In opposition, Luther repeatedly asserted the unity of the Word and Spirit. The Word was not merely a 'testimony' or 'witness' to the experience of the Spirit. Any experience, even one of the Spirit, could not be self-authenticating; it need always to be tested by the revealed Word of God. Not the experience but the Word was the final arbiter of God's truth."²²

We need to get back to reading, memorizing and living out the Scripture.

Not only do we need a total commitment to the doctrines of the Scripture but we need as well:

2) A Total Commitment To The Local Church.

Christians need to be in a balanced, healthy, Bible-teaching church. Christians as well need to plead with their pastors to preach doctrine and then pray consistently for them. Worship, fellowship and Bible teaching keep us in balance and protects us from the deceptions that not only fill our world but fill our churches. Every pastor should have in his library Jay Adams' three volumes on *Studies in Preaching* or Andrew Blackwood's *Doctrinal Preaching for Today*.

People use all kinds of *excuses* for not being in a good church. How silly it would be to apply the same shallow rationale to sports events: "I won't go to that ballgame because there are too many hypocrites there." "I won't go to that game because my parents

made me go as a child." "I won't go to that stadium because all they want is money." "I won't go to that event because it lasts too long." Frankly, we go to what interests us. If there is no heart for God or His house, it tells so much about us and our spiritual state. Hebrews 10:25 commands us to consistently attend church. How can we love and serve the brethren as commanded in so many of the Epistles if we are never around them?

3) Total Commitment To and Reliance On The Christ Of The Scriptures.

Hymn writer Joseph Scriven was a man who knew great personal loss and was thrown into tragedy and grief after the drowning of his fiancé. Later he met another and intended to marry when she died suddenly. Yet he was able to write:

"What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!"

Surely he knew Christ and found his stability in knowing what Christ had done and was doing for Him. What kept him going was not a chill up his spine but a sure knowledge of a Savior who cared for and carried him. Life's challenges do not have to break us. They can bend us toward Christ.

When emotions run out and the feelings are gone, we need to fall back on our Lord and on promises like Romans 8:38-39, knowing by faith that *nothing* can separate us from His love.

Erich Sauer pointedly reminds us:

"... the one who has been called to the kingdom has not only to decide at his *conversion* which master he will serve but has thereupon to make the same decision every day and in each practical detail of his life of *sanctification*."²³

If we are going to resist and overcome Athens in our day, we must at all costs be sold out to the doctrines of the Bible, to the work of the Church and to a daily living fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Endnotes:

1. See further, Gerhardt Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964, Vol. 2, pg. 20.
2. Peter Jones, *Spirit Wars*, Mukilteo, Wash.: WinePress Publishing, 1997, pg. 27.
3. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1910, Vol. 2, pg. 429.
4. Michael Horton, *In the Face of God, The Dangers and Delights of Spiritual Intimacy*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996, pg. 46.
5. G. Richard Fisher and M. Kurt Goedelman, *The Confusing World of Benny Hinn*. Saint Louis: Personal Freedom Outreach, 1997, pp. 195-196.
6. *Christianity Today*, Feb. 9, 1998, pg. 46.
7. See further, *The Christian News*, July 21, 1997, "Jesus Christ Was Really a Woman," pg. 9.
8. Hank Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997, pg. 245-246.
9. James R. Coggins and Paul G. Hiebert, *Wonders And The Word*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: Kindred Press, 1989, pp. 10-11.
10. See further, Mark Bubeck, *Spiritual Warfare Basics*. Sioux City, Iowa: International Center for Biblical Counseling, no date, pg. 23.
11. "Bob Larson Resources 1998," ministry resource catalog.
12. Audio clip of Bob Larson on the Trinity Broadcasting Network (4/16/96) featured by Hank Hanegraaff on various editions of *The Bible Answer Man* radio broadcast, (tape on file).
13. See further, *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 1994, "Angels We Have Heard on High? — What Are We Really Hearing in the New Obsession with Angels?", pp. 4, 10-12.
14. Joni Eareckson Tada, *Heaven Your Real Home*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1995, pg. 84.
15. Evander Holyfield and Bernard Holyfield, *Holyfield The Humble Warrior*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996, pp. 7-12.
16. See further, *The Confusing World of Benny Hinn*, op. cit., pp. 1, 45, 52.
17. See further, Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Vol. 14, pg. 150.
18. William Evans, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1974, pg. 5.
19. Cited in *In the Face of God*, op. cit., pg. 134.
20. For more information on the "Pensacola Outpouring" and the Brownsville Revival, see *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 1997 and January-March 1998.
21. W.E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine's: Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984, pp. 323-324.
22. *Wonders And The Word*, op. cit., pg. 36.
23. Erich Sauer, *In The Arena Of Faith*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956, pg. 70.

EDITORIALS

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ing changes before, but church doctrine was not significantly altered. This church places public image at a premium."

The latter observation of the "Truths That Transform Action Sheet" was indeed insightful as in the early evangelical congresses in which the Pasadena-based church participated, members of its Public Affairs department, not its theologians, were the sect's representatives at these meetings.

Moreover, throughout the transformation — and even now in its wake — an issue that needs careful consideration is: Are the changes mere external representations or true internal persuasions?

Robert L. Sumner astutely noted that the Worldwide Church of God's "changes seem more *convenience* than *conviction*!" In his recent article "Is Armstrong's Cult Now Orthodox?" he writes:

"While going through their alleged metamorphose from a worm to a butterfly, the leaders repeatedly changed and modified their statements to please their 'guides.' For example, in the matter of the Trinity, especially as it related to the Holy Spirit, they would agree among themselves as to a position, then go to those whom they were trying to please, and say, 'How is this?' The latter would reply, 'It doesn't go far enough.' So they would go back to the drawing board and make suggested

changes, then return and ask, 'Now what do you think?' That kind of 'doctoring doctrine' is not the stuff of which true Bible believers are made" (*The Biblical Evangelist*, Nov.-Dec. 1997, pg. 7).

Early in the Worldwide Church of God's transformation process, PFO itself was asked by the sect's Pasadena headquarters to update literature to "reflect accurate information" as to the changes being made. Because the official theological positions of the Worldwide Church of God were in an unpredictable state of flux at that time, PFO was less than eager to make immediate changes.

In 1991, PFO responded to the request by saying, "If we update our article today, there is no guarantee that in a few months you would not be writing again asking for further revisions." A few years later, starting in 1995, PFO began to evaluate the Worldwide Church of God's move from cultism to orthodoxy in a series of articles. However, PFO's words to Worldwide Church of God leadership in its 1991 letter proved to be prophetic.

Late last year, the leadership of the church again wrote to PFO, this time asserting that PFO's revised "material is at best one-sided, containing half-truths, assumptions, and subjective judgments that are followed by a long list of somewhat dubious footnotes." The church's comments strongly propose that the PFO articles are greatly imprecise and in no way convey an accurate representation of its present conduct.

Yet at the very time PFO was receiving the Worldwide Church of God's censure, former members of the church were writing PFO and saying just the opposite — comments such as: "Thank you for addressing the issue